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ABSTRACT

This review of the literature on adaptations in art education for students with disabilities begins with a statement of the theory that if handicapped students' beginning experiences in art are positive and successful, students will have a positive outlook and a desire to create further in art. The review describes the application of task analysis to art activities, the emergence of art education within special education, art media, ways in which handicapping conditions can be overcome in art education, instructional guidelines, and figure drawing analysis. (Contains 28 references.) (JDD)

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RECENT APPROACHES TO ART INSTRUCTION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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by

Ilene Spencer

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A review of the literature

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Abstract

Recent Approaches to Art Instruction in Special Education.

Researched by Ilene Spencer

Exploration and involvement with disabled students is investigated through a review of the literature, theories and practices of art instruction. Art mediums and guidelines for instruction are reviewed, along with an overlying theme of overcoming handicapping conditions in art education.

Much literature is found to be available, thorough, and relative to the Special Education classroom. Various opinions and methods are revealed along with historical research. The 1970's and 1980's has brought us many new insights into special education. More research in the future will benefit the child with disabilities even further.

Theoretical Rationale

For a child in school, the arts is the one area that personal feelings can be expressed creatively. Creativity in expressions through art exposes the child to many different concepts and tasks that cannot be met in the regular school curriculum. To manipulate in a skillful manner and achieve control over the different art mediums, one can build in a child deep feelings of achievement and self motivation along with developing a positive self image. Positive experiences will in turn motivate the student in other academic areas. An important outcome of expression through art is the handicapped student's recognition of pride and accomplishment.

Through a review of the literature on art instruction in relation to students with disabilities, identification of what type of studies are being done along with the researchers' theories and strategies will be exposed in this paper.

With adaptations to art instruction, the research identifies with the instructor and suggests means to determine what additional materials or instruction are needed to help students accomplish their goals. The overlying theory is that if the handicapped student's beginning experiences in art are positive and successful then he will have a positive outlook and a desire to create further in art.

Task Analysis

An informative article written by Morreau and Anderson (1986) acquaints us to some theories on instruction stating, "In an effort to provide realistic alternatives to often useless standardized or gimmick approaches to art for handicapped learners, art educators have developed activities that allow for creative expression within the

parameters of various disabilities. Yet, teachers are frequently dismayed by the apparent inability of a handicapped child to complete projects "designed" for her or him. Failure, in many cases, is attributed to the child's unique handicapping condition rather than to limitations of existing planning processes for meeting the child's needs. What might be needed for development of art curricula leading to success for handicapped learners is reduction of large skill units (that learners are unlikely to master) into small steps that, if collectively demonstrated, represent the larger skill".

Task analysis is the process of reducing skills that are needed to achieve a goal, in a manner of sequential steps. In their 1986 article, Morreau and Anderson stress that emphasis should be placed on the skills the student must learn to complete the activity, rather than emphasizing activities for disabled learners. These children see themselves as children first, and then a child with a handicapping condition. Salisbury (1991) notes this idea in her article on mainstreaming, "children without disabilities assume that all classes contain friends with a range of abilities and needs".

Lowenfeld (1947) claims that "for the child, art is not the same as it is for the adult. Art for the child is merely a means of expression. Since the child's thinking is different from that of the adult's, his expression must also be different". We must learn to see the child through the eyes of the child himself, and adapt art instruction as necessary.

Students with handicaps tend to have great difficulty with tasks and concepts. By simplifying directions and modifying materials, art education strategies can be adapted to the handicapped student. This will provide opportunities for success and develop positive self images

despite their handicapping conditions.

The Emergence of Art and Special Education Together

Art and special educators are becoming aware of the enormous potential that art may have as an instructional strategy for teaching the handicapped (Anderson, 1978: Arnheim, 1983: Brubeck, 1981: Zamierowski, 1980). Integration of the visual arts into the special education curriculum can serve to train and reinforce deficient perceptual, motor, and academic skills. Moreover, participation in the arts can also become a vehicle from which to enhance weak self-concepts in special children. Both research and opinion in educational literature support this belief (Dalke, 1984). Significant gains can be seen in children participating in art. Art activities often tend to help people feel unique and productive, experience feelings of acceptance, value themselves and others, make decisions, and gain self-confidence (Omizo & Omizo, 1988). In her article dealing with the mentally retarded students, Bridges (1986) reports, "Despite their handicaps, these students are capable of creating art work that depicts their experiences or their relationships with others. Instruction in the visual arts encourages them to explore and use their imagination and may help them in their socialization processes". It is evident their is much in-depth research found on art instruction.

Art Meduims and Early Childhood Education

In a publication by the National Art Education Association, Salome (1991) raises the important question of, "Why are children and adolescents trained in every area of the school curriculum except art and, in particular, drawing?" Another significant issue brought to

the surface was, "Are large crayons and wide brushes the best drawing tools for young children to use? Whether children in a regular educational setting or children with handicapping conditions in a special educational setting, this is a very applicable question.

Salome (1968) gives a detailed description of the essence of the methods of using art mediums. He thoroughly investigates the comparison of kindergarten children's drawings done with large crayons or with colored pencils on 12" x 18" paper and found that there were no significant differences between groups in regards to the amount of detail they included. He did note that a few individuals included more detail in drawings with colored pencils than with the large, blunt crayons. Larger shapes were drawn by the children and they filled in more space on the paper with their crayon drawings, which may be attributed to the size of the paper used.

Salome observed art lessons in a kindergarten class and discovered that these young pupils can use pencils without breaking off the points or experiencing physical discomfort as some literature suggests they might and a large majority of elementary school personnel believe. In an article that researched the use of only wide paint brushes in kindergarten, Seefeldt (1973) evaluated kindergarten children painting on easels with wide and narrow brushes. He found that the paintings created with the narrow brushes were most definitely more complex and detailed than those created with wide brushes. Subsequent to these experimental studies, as the literature suggests, it was observed that children will select small drawing media and narrow brushes when they are available.

From the point of view of the literature it has been suggested during studio activities, to substitute pudding as finger paint. This

choice has expressive capability, along with a non-offensive taste, should a student find his fingers in his mouth, and is appropriate for the younger student. The older student many use moist and soggy paper pulp in place of finger paint, which may present to be too fluid for the disabled student.

A most important statement by Salome (1991) states that the findings of these studies are contrary to the view that the amount of detail, the complexity, and accuracy of young children's drawings are affected primarily by their mental and physical development rather than media used. Perhaps teachers should make both large and small drawing media available to satisfy the needs of individual children.

Overcoming Handicapping Conditions in Art Education

Perhaps a child has extreme difficulty in the handling of brushes, the literature reveals that the utilization of fingers instead, may prove successful. For example, children who are having perceptual problems are likely to have noticeable problems in reconstruction tasks such as handwriting or completing visually oriented worksheets.

Art is also a fantastic means of non-verbal expression for the handicapped child who has difficulty in communication and expressing themselves orally. The special education teacher can consult the art teacher about individual students, to develop appropriate art instruction.

Due to the fact that handicapped students many times have difficulty comprehending what the teacher expects of them in a lesson, Salome (1991) asks, "Is teacher demonstration-explanation more effective than presentation of completed examples in teaching

students to draw visual objects?". Along with this comes the inquiry of whether or not drawing an object helps to develop a mental image of that object. In a strong and detailed article, Lansing (1981), assessed of kindergarten children's development of mental representations based on their drawings of a model figure and an eight item visual test requiring identification of the model when placed among distractors. Lansing discovered upon three conclusions: " a) observing and drawing a figure produces more growth in the mental representation of that figure than either observation only, or observation and finger tracing of the figure, b) finger tracing affects more growth in the mental representation of the test figure than observation only, and c) drawing a perceived figure affects a more persistent memory of that figure than either observation or finger tracing of the figure.

Twenty three days after the experimental period, children who had drawn the model figure and those who had traced it still exhibited a higher degree of mental representation of the figure than pupils who only observed or had no contact with the model". This only strengthens the concept being expressed, the more senses you can involve in a child's learning, the better the results.

Probably the most monumental unearthing of art instruction being exposed, was in a continuing study on the effect of drawing in the development of mental representations as Lansing (1984) examines the effects of the size of the drawing, repeated drawing of objects and visual instruction prior to drawing a figure. Lansing came to three conclusions: " a) drawing a perceived figure with a pointed pencil results in more accurate mental representation of the figure than drawing the figure with a blunt crayon, b) drawing a figure six

times affects more accurate mental representations and more persistent memory of the figure than drawing it two times, and c) instruction to perceive a figure prior to drawing it affects more accurate mental representation and more persistent memory of the figure than drawing without visual instruction". Drawing can positively help children to learn and be able to recall the visual characteristics of objects.

A large majority of literature available review the suggestion that special education and art instruction should work together. New educational opportunities can be developed for the disabled students, who would benefit greatly in all area of study. Blandy (1989) states, " the disabled student, who is perceived as deviant and in need of "special" art education curriculum goals, objectives, and learning activities, is likely to be segregated within the educational system".

Fundamental Guidelines For Instruction

As persons with significant mental/physical challenges develop, a widening gap occurs between their chronological and mental ages (Blandy, Pancsofar, & Mockensturm, 1988). Copeland (1984) writes, "For teaching art to the developmentally handicapped or mentally retarded, the curriculum should include (1) structured, repetitive art activities with minimal art concepts, (2) both tactile and sensory approaches, (3) task organization including use and care of materials as well as task follow-through (4) emphasis on art fundamentals and art elements necessary for creative expression, (5) gross and fine motor muscle development and eye-hand coordination tasks, and (6) gradual addition of steps in sequential order". Copeland takes into account the five assumed characteristics of developmentally

handicapped or mentally retarded children, (based on an old school of thought, proven to be inaccurate due to many exceptions to the rule). Those five assumptions are: (1) difficulty with concept formation and abstraction, (2) shorter attention spans, (3) poorer memories that increase the need for repetition and over-learning of materials (4) need for perserveration or the need to repeat something over and over, and (5) difficulty in applying generalization skills. Copeland believes that in planning an art curriculum for young educable mentally retarded children, the approach should parallel a preschool or nursery school stimulus and sensitivity program. Once a child reaches age 8, Copeland states, " The teaching approach will parallel a kindergarten or first grade level program".

Dalke (1984) noted the idea that art experiences discourage copying and may also lead to a better self-image for the child with handicaps. Reviews of the literature on art instruction, are finding that originality rather than copying correctly is rewarded. Consequently, concern about the looks of a final product need not frustrate or hamper the potential creative urges of a handicapped child.

When we look at historical research we will find in contrast to the writings of Dalke (1984), that copying from pictures was a practice. Duncum (1985) intensely researched autobiographies and biographies of 35 artists born between 1724 and 1900, and determined that the 35 artists did copy from pictures, both fine art and/or popular art images. The fine art included works in galleries, prints and reproductions with the popular art ranging from illustrations in books to newspaper cartoons.

Duncum (1986) concludes quite thoroughly, "copying is a

learning strategy which helps students develop the ability to use representational schemata in drawings of objects and events. Duncum Offerimg a few guides for classroom practices He claims, "Copying can be a learning strategy if it is not prolonged and mechanical, but is an interpretation or the syntheses of several originals, and when copying is done in an interpretive way, it may help children acquire the graphic schemata necessary for representation in drawing".

Robertson (1987), in his research on borrowing and artistic behavior, claims that "some departure from copying is necessary if the individual's drawing is to avoid becoming mere replication of conventional images". Robertson theorizes, copying in itself does not promote creative artistic expression, but the skills one acquires through it can be used later on in creating one's own art work.

Much of the literature suggests ways to adapt art instruction to the disabled student. Typically for physically disabled students, lowering or raising of tables or perhaps providing lap boards will be of great advantage. Also handles of tools or materials such as crayons, can be made larger so that the student can grasp them effectively. This may be an absolute requirement with some students. For those students that are hearing impaired written instructions either on the black board or on paper may facilitate learning. A child that is unable to cut with scissors may be instructed on tearing paper to achieve similar results.

Figure Drawing Analysis and the Disabled Student

In relation to human figure drawing, Ottenbacher, Haley, Abbott, and Watson (1984) relate in a lengthy article woven with medical terminology, the ability to complete human figure drawings

depend upon adequate motor control, eye-hand coordination, and the ability to relate one's body to external space. Anecdotal reports and clinical observations have emphasized that the figure drawings of learning disabled children frequently show evidence of disturbed or faulty body image (Poliak, 1986). Along with this line of thought, Pikulski (1972) claims, "The body-image disturbance thought to be revealed in the drawings of learning disabled children has been attributed, at least in part, to weaknesses in visual-perceptual and/or visual-motor integrative skills thought to be related to a neurodevelopmental lag. Maria Montessori advocated that the hand always be involved in learning (Gitta, 1983). One could conclude that performance in art, has many unstable variables that may influence a child's ability. This should be taken into account when evaluating each child and creating an individualized art program.

Others studies in the literature found more variables that effected children's drawings. Clare (1988) found that children included more details in drawings of a person on a large piece of paper than figure drawings on a small piece of paper. Also noted by Clare was a reoccurrence in young children drawing "my family", with these multiple figure drawings the children drew their figures of graduated height, from either large to small or small to large according to the order drawn first to last. This important finding is contrary to the belief that in young children's drawings emotional significance determines the size of the drawings.

Handicapped people may very well be quite capable of creating artwork that is exceptional, as Kendall reveals in his article on the French Impressionistic painter, Degas, "In his drawings and paintings, Degas was capable of exceptional exactitude, but he would also

introduce passages of highly unorthodox imprecision, such as a hazy foreground or a blurred contour on a moving figure. Kendall concludes that Degas was "painting the world as he saw it through his damaged eyes". Edgar Degas, one of the best impressionistic painters of all times, is believed to have been visually impaired.

Summary and Closure

Creativity can consist of various levels for the handicapped child. Through a variety of sensory experiences the child can develop conceptual understanding, aesthetic values, creative behavior, craftsmanship and the ability to value their own work while expressing one's inner feelings. Henley (1987) points out, "We must acknowledge the resilience and fortitude of disabled children and build on their strengths rather than emphasize their weaknesses". In agreement Lowenfeld (1987) claims, "It is one of my deepest innermost convictions that wherever there is a spark of human spirit, no matter how dim it may be, it is our sacred responsibility as humans, teachers, and educators to fan it into whatever flame it conceivably may develop".

The majority of the literature states that the child must be able to understand the idea or concept being presented. Simultaneously, the comprehension of the usage of the art materials available and the abilities needed, is also necessary. Much of the literature claims that the child must be capable of using the art materials to express himself in the concept as directed by his art instructor. At the end, the child must evaluate how successful he communicated his ideas through his art. If a child can explore his world through expressions in art, he will in turn, experience great achievements and motivational

experiences.

The literature reviewed has demonstrated that art instruction can be adapted to the handicapped student to help him obtain these goals and art materials must be evaluated by the instructor, from the handicapped student's position. It is up to the instructor to analyze his student's handicapping conditions and adapt the art materials for each student.

An examination of the literature has shown to be in agreement with the statement of Gitter (1983), "Yet, art education in most schools is not what it could be- a liberation of the spirit, an introduction into a great world of beauty, and a means of training the senses".

Throughout the literature are various references to Edward Sequin who developed lesson techniques in art appreciation and other notables such as Maria Montessori and Art Therapist Viktor Lowenfeld who have an immense body of knowledge to share.

Unfortunately, existing research on art instruction has added very little to the knowledge we already have about children and their handicapping conditions in relation to art instruction. For someone not familiar with art and/or art instruction, the literature is very informative, well written and a good place to begin a search for knowledge. A wealth of suggestions of methods in instruction are readily available and in somewhat of an excess. One may assume most art instructors already are aware of these concepts, either gained in their teaching education or discovered by trial and error.

Future research is desperately called for in all areas of art education separate, or in parallel to art therapy, to help discover this gap in education that so greatly is effecting all children with handicapping conditions.

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